DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 302 306 JC 890 033

AUTHOR Berger, Jeffrey
TITLE The Language of Curriculum Deliberations.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at a Conference of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Curriculum; College Instruction; Community Colleges; Curriculum Design; *Curriculum Development; Curriculum Problems; *Educational Objectives; Faculty Development; *General Education; *Teacher Attitudes; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Drawing from tapes of meetings and documents produced during a month-long curriculum development institute, this paper describes the conflicts attending an effort to design a structured general studies program at the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP). The paper presents and analyzes two fundamentally different ways of conceiving of problems, program goals, and the faculty development process through the voices of two faculty members who stood at the center of the debate. The argument is put forth that the theoretical commitments of the faculty members to "culture" on the one hand and to "meaningfulness" on the other hand ensured that no agreement was possible. The differences separating the two faculty members are analyzed in terms of their perceptions of the intellectual level of teaching at the college. One faculty member advocated an interpretive approach to teaching higher-order thinking skills and criticized the opposing position as concerned only with information transfer and lower-level thought process. The other faculty member was more concerned with motivational issues and the meaningfulness of assignments to students and underscored the importance of situating assignments in an affective environment that encourages learning. Finally, the paper examines the elements of the general studies program that the participants were able to agree upon, the compromises that were made, and the incompatibilities remaining in the final document drawn up to represent both programs. (AAZC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED302306

The Language of Curriculum Deliberations

by

Jeffrey Berger

Associate Professor of Philosophy

Community College of Philadelphia

1700 Spring Garden St.

Philadelphia, Pa. 19130

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Berger

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• s of view or opinions stated in this docu- do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

IC 890 033

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This is the story of curriculum deliberations. It could be emplotted in a number of ways. Some might see it as tragic, others as comic or ironic. Some might even emplot it as a romance. The story could be told from the perspective of personality conflicts, or as a struggle for power and prestige. This would almost certainly be the way that the administration at the Community College of Philadelphia would tell the story. From the administration's perspective, it is a story of in-fighting and squabbling that could easily be resolved, if only the participants would act out of good will and agree to compromise.

The adminstration's story begins when they asked two faculty members who had designed a highly successful Transfer Opportunities Program (TOP) to extend their work and design a general studies program. In response to changing requirements at four year colleges over the years, the Community College of Philadelphia had de-emphasized its traditional liberal arts transfer program and allowed students to graduate with virtually any combination of courses that added up to 60 credits. With a significant and rising number of graduates in general studies, and with the tightening of requirements at four year institutions, the college felt that it was necessary to give students a more structured program.

The program the two faculty members developed met with violent opposition. An outside observer who was evaluating progress under the original grant saw the transfer program as "encircled by a series of organized and unorganized forces which, together, have effectively cordoned it off from programatic areas where it could make a decisive difference in 'turning the college around'." He saw this encirclement as resulting from "power and status problems" and "jealousy". Battlelines were drawn. Faculty worried about changes in enrollment patterns, or just resistant to change joined the opposition. Alternative proposals were floated. In the midst of the ensuing uproar, and seeing a need for a peaceful solution, the administration paid representatives of all sides to come together over the first summer session to develop a joint program, while the two original proposal makers, whose very presence was an irritant to the other side, withdrew to write their memoirs.

Both the outside observer and the administration appear to have had the same view of the dispute---that what stood in the way of a compromise was good will. The solution, therefore, was to lock the disputants into a room for a month in the hopes that the bonds of human solidarity would produce in this "Hult Close" a will to compromise. In fact, the group did finally agree on a document and that agreement can largely be attributed to the fact that friendships were forged over Chinese food and to the fact that they were

mandated by the administration to arrive at a single document. However, this agreement concealed a deeper disagreement. So, while the final document is written in the language of the TOP group, the leadership of this group has withdrawn to "tend their gardens" and the other two groups are in charge of faculty development.

This is the story I want to tell---how a group of people who had good will and good intentions could produce a joint document, but still could not reach an agreement about fundamental issues. Good will can produce an agreement not to disagree, to paper over differences, to find language that would seem to accomodate all sides. However, it cannot overcome two fundamentally different ways of conceiving of problems, two different ways of conceiving of program goals and two different ways of conceiving of the faculty development process. As we will see, each side, not because of ill will, but because of its theoretical commitments, is incapable of seeing the opposition in anything but its own categories.

The story centers around two individuals, call them Alex and Nora, who are at the center of the debate and who are constantly bickering, like unhappy spouses. But, as Tolstoy reminds us "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." While many of the members of the "General Studies Institute" saw the dispute as a family feud (with nothing but personality

differences standing between the two), the two participants saw principled differences in their positions and saw themselves as struggling to articulate these differences. Fortunately, all of the sessions were taped, with the hope that the resulting tapes could be used to examine curriculum deliberations. It is upon these tapes, and documents produced by Nora and Alex during the deliberations, that this analysis is based. Since there are over 100 hours of material, any one analysis will naturally be selective and pespectival. That is why I claim that many different stories could be told based on the tapes.

In my story, I will argue that there are significant differences between Nora and Alex such that no agreement could be possible. The analysis will focus on two words "meaningful" and "culture". Alex is insistent that the analysis of the problem they are trying to solve be couched in terms of differences in student and faculty "cultures". Nora is, as she puts it, "uncomfortable" with this terminology.

> Nora: It's an oversimplification to talk of culture. It's a sociological construct that is not rich enough to plan curriculum. (5/7, B-1, 45)

> Nora: I'm very suspicious of that concept (culture) because the concept is very paternalistic. It implies

an induction metaphor....There is something almost academically elite about it.

Alex: I think this language is very rich. Once you start talking about culture, you are talking about all sorts of hidden aspects of behavior, things down in the deep structure....What has to be transformed is not only giving them skills, but in some way transforming them as individuals and the way in which they relate to one another and the world.

Nora: I don't agree with that.....What we need to do is get them very very motivated, get them to see why this is an important activity that they are doing. Why it is meaningful to their lives. Why it is meaningful to their intellectual growth. (5/7, A-1, 38-70)

Nora wants to develop a "meaningful" curriculum, while Alex is openingly scornful of the term "meaningful".

Alex: I'm a little leary of "meaningful". The problem with meaningful is meaningful to whom and in what sense of meaning you mean meaning. (5/13, A-2, 183)

Alex: It's basically hype. The focus is on the individual. I say what you want to do is transform the student culture (5/7, A-1, 85).

In response to a document in which Nora presents her position, Alex uncovers three senses of "meaningfulness":

> Sometimes when she is talking about a meaningful problem it turns out to be a problem that is crucial to the discipline....But, sometimes she talks about them as if they were problems of interest to the students, and there is a third one, where it says that we want to teach in such a way that the students will become interested in this. (5/29, B-1, 401)

Clearly, "culture" and "meaningfulness" are buzz words which produce a strong reaction from the other side. Yet, neither of the participants will give up their word (or allow the other word to be used). One explanation for this is that the concepts of "meaningfulness" and "culture" are "overdetermined" for the participants. These words represent each of the praticipant's entire program nutshelled into a single concept. Unpacking these concepts, can thus lead us to understanding the differences that separate Alex and Nora.

Alex's talk of differing intellectual cultures can be translated fairly easily into the language of cognitive psychology because the problem that Alex is trying to address is the intellectual level of the teaching at the college. When Alex characterizes the document that the group has produced by the middle of the discussions, he

says: "What they call for is skills, which I would call higher order thinking" (5/18, A-2, 200). "The taxonomy we have, if you think of it in terms of higher and lower level intellectual activities, much as Bloom's taxonomy, the primary focus is that much of the lower level activities are already being done by students, whereas the higher level one's are not" (5/12, A-2, 400).

The problem that Alex wants to address is that faculty do not design assignments for students that will elicit "higher level" thinking. Alex is not familiar with the literature in the field of cognitive psychology, so he expresses these ideas in the language of differing cultures. His program and ways of discussing it have been developed inductively in the Honors and Transfer Opportunity Programs. The "Intellectual Evironment" section of the final document, which is in Alex's language, is revealing of the types of categories he is employing. They can be seen as paralleling the categories of Perry's Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme.

In characterizing his own approach, Alex says; "What is powerful about the interpretive approach is that it gets students out of thinking that there is one way of looking at a problem or solving it" (5/11, B-1, 200). This can be taken as an attempt to move students to seeing the world in terms of competing positions within which students have to situate themselves ("Commitment in Relativism"). In

characterizing current student intellectual level, Alex reproduces the categories of "Basic Duality" and "Relativism Diffuse" from Perry.

> The intellectual world is very different for students and faculty members. For example, students typically approach their textbooks as literally true representations of reality. Faculty know that each textbook represents only a perspective on the subject matter. When students become aware of the differences in intellectual outlook, they typically reduce these differences to differences of opinion (Proposal, p. 2).

From Alex's perspective, Nora's discussion of motivational issues simply misses the point. It is the solution to an entirely different problem, a problem which is at best secondary, relatively easily resolved and which Alex does not even admit exists. More importantly, he sees questions of motivation as distractions from the type of issues that should be discussed and the types of reforms that should be instituted. Questions of the meaningfulness of assignments, which for Nora appear to be dependent on relevance for students, can be addressed without ever addressing the issue of the intellectual level of assignments.

This can be seen through a comparison of the types of assignments Nora and Alex each value (See Appendix). It is

difficult to see from Nora's examples what it is that makes these assignments "meaningful" for students (unless it is assumed that these are issue of such crucial importance that they would be interesting to all people) except for the fact that they ask students what they would do or how they conceive of the problem. (This may explain why Nora emphasizes the wider environment as the basis for making assignments meaningful for students.) However, there is clearly a difference in intellectual level in the questions, as can be seen from an examination of the two questions on tragedy. Nora's question treats the classic notion of tragedy as if it were unproblematic, while the question taken from the Honors Program makes the notion of tragedy the center of a debate. Nora has a set of questions that are at best loosely related, while the Honors Program assignment is a tightly structured assignment which asks students to resolve a dilemma by adopting a perspective that will make sense of Aristotle's notion of tragedy. In that students are asked to adopt a perspective among competing perspectives, the assignment would appear to require students to work at Perry's highest level.

It is difficult to explain Nora's assignments in Perry's categories. However, her self characterization suggests that she may be working within Piaget's categories.

> The inquiry approach is so powerful for both curriculum and teaching because instead of focusing on the accretion or acquisition of bits of knowledge, it dwells on selecting activities and texts that help satisfy the human need to know and understand, to satisfy curiosity and to solve problems.

Several other times, Nora indicates that she is interested in effecting cognitive growth. "We need to have people think more effectively, communicate more effectively" (5/7, A-1, 147). "More problematic....is the lack of skills, an inability to see connections (5/7, A-1, 235). "We are not doing enough to get students to write a lot, different kinds of thinking, making assignments problem based. By problem based I mean connecting assignments to specific audiences, specific purposes, specific tasks" (5/11, B-2, 26). When asked about what she meant by intelligent investigation, Nora responds:

> Being able to adjust your thinking to the task at hand, which means practical reasoning, bringing to bear reasoning powers within a given context, learning to apply theories from different sources, theoretical positions from different areas, to make an eclectic, pragmatic decision at a given time....not to use the same approach to every problem, but to have different ways of approaching problems (5/13, A-2, 300)

Clearly, Nora does want to teach students to "think" and opposes rote learning of information. However, for the purposes of the debate with Alex, the significant point is that, while she wants to teach a "variety" of thinking strategies, she does distinguish between higher and lower levels of thinking. Nora: "I can think of a series of problems in which students will have a wide variety of experiences in dealing with different types of intellectual pursuit. I can think of a problem where students will have some experience doing some kind of research" (5/21, C-2, 294).

As far as Nora is concerned, the dominant form of instruction is information transfer and it is important to move instruction towards thinking skills. However, Alex says: "The reason I am so insistent is that I see a lot of this other stuff (Nora's style of problem solving) already going on, and this stuff (his higher order thinking) not going on" (5/11, B-2, 8). From Nora's perspective, she is being inclusive of all forms of reasoning and is, therefore, willing to include the types of problems Alex is discussing in the program. From her perspective, Alex's intellectual agenda is only a piece of her wider program. Alex: "Being able to characterize what has been going on in this discussion for the past two hours is more powerful than being able to give a logical argument." Nora: "That's part of it" (5/11, A-2, 520).

From Alex's perspective, Nora is only interested in lower level thought processes. Nora says: "In problem solving, you have to pick up information to solve problems...You have to look up information to solve a problem" (5/13, A-1, 120). Given Nora's self characterization, the problem solving approach can be simply another method for acquiring information, and, thus, a low level intellectual activity. Thus, for Alex, Nora's program is low level intellectual activities plus teaching strategies to motivate students. It is, thus, incomplete and, more importantly, merely reproduces the intellectual environment already in place in the college. Rather than being a solution to the problem, Nora's program appears to be the problem.

On the other hand, Alex's program appears incomplete to Nora because it does not address the affective issues in learning, while hers does. Thus, Nora says:

> We really do perceive the fundamental reason for education differently. If my students don't leave my class understanding and experiencing a poem, the short story, and the power it has on many levels, on the metaphoric level, on the level of enhancing them as human beings, this gut feeling, not only this intellect.....a sense of wow this is gorgeous, this is really something. If they don't do that, but they know

how to talk like an academic, I would feel to a large part, not completely, to a large part I failed (5/13, B-2, 15).

Even more important for Nora, though, is the fact that Alex does not see the need to situate problems in an affective environment which will encourage learning. Rather than basing her program in a theory of cognitive maturity (a theory of higher and lower levels of thinking), Nora bases herself on a learning theory.

> Nora: There is a lot of research to show that isolated skills approaches don't work and there is research which shows that when skills are taught in the context of a larger issue of a problem, an interpretive problem, that is when you remember....Also, there is a lot of evidence about application, that students learn things when there is application (5/14, A-1, 101).
>
> Alex: It's a learning theory about how students learn best through engaging in inquiry.
> Nora: Yes. It's Dewey's sense of the way students learn (5/14, A-1, 205).

If one begins from a learning theory, then the question being answered is how to get students interested in the material----motivation. The concept of meaningfulness is there as a placeholder for all of those types of activities that will help to motivate students indepedently of the

intellectual level. Beginning from a theory of cognitive maturity, the question being answered in how to move students from one intellectual level to another, or in Alex's anthropological language from one culture to another. Nora sees students as lacking intellectual skills and wants to help faculty develop the ability to design assignments and activities which will motivate students to acquire these skills, while Alex wants to move students from one way of conceiving of the world to another.

Borrowing language from the philosophy of science, Nora's program can be seen as accumulationist in that it sees students development in terms of the gradual accumulation of skills and information. Alex's language is Kuhnian, in that it sees students moving from one paradigmatic way of looking at the world to another. In response to Nora's presentation of what is lacking in the environment, Alex says: "I would like to put that positively, because I think that it is part of the problem, not that there is a lack of something, but the presence of something else. There is a student culture..."(5/7, A-1, 8).

Beginning from a theory of learning leads Nora to an emphasis in faculty development on teaching practices. "I would also be interested , and I said this before, not to depend so heavily on assignments, but to take an assignment and talk about what you need to do in order to give this

assignment, what kind of teaching practices that would enable you to deal with this kind of assignment" (5/21, C-2, 160). "We need to focus in our staff development not only on assignments, which is very good and very nice, but also in the staff development project looking at the teaching strategies which foster the ways of learning" (5/13, A-1, 450). At one point (6/1, C-1, 4), Nora suggests that they should have faculty development workshops on team teaching and Alex is dumbfounded that anyone would suggest such an idea.

From Alex's perspective, teaching style is subordinate to the intellectual agenda. "As far as I can see, the inquiry method, from what Nora wrote, is classroom techniques. Whereas the interpretive agenda is setting the intellectual agenda. That makes the inquiry technique subordinate to the overall agenda" (5/12, A-1, 45). "I am not concerned as much about pedagogy, what is going on in the classroom, as much as I am concerned about types of assignments we are going to give students as carrying a certain intellectual agenda" (5/11, B-2, 495).

Alex clearly sees the question of motivating students as irrelevant. But, if that it so, it is either because he views the program as inherently motivating or sees the students as already motivated. Alex suggests both ideas. "We are creating an environment to move students to their goals....We want to create the culture they are trying to

get into" (6/1, A-1, 642). Clearly, if faculty and student goals coincide, students will already be interested in entering the culture faculty are setting up. Nora, on the other hand, says "The goal of general studies is to educate a human being" (5/7, A-1, 189); but, students do not necessarily enter the college with that goal. Thus, it becomes necessary for Nora to find some external motivation for students to accept faculty goals.

Alex also suggests that there is something about the intellectual problems that he wants to pose for students that makes them inherently "real".

> You can give them the free will/determinism problem and they may never be interested in it in the sense psychologically. In a sense, it is a real problem that they have with their language. Maybe they will decide that I don't want to deal with that problem or I'm not interested in solving that problem. The other problems that are set up for them may be psychologically interesting, but they are not <u>real</u>...If you are a good teacher, you may interest them in it, and that has more to do with teaching technique than its being a real problem...Then, it becomes a matter of saying we should do a good job of teaching. We should interest the students in what we are doing (5/29, B-1, 450).

For Alex, the types of problems that Nora raises simply are not genuine intellectual problems, and the important point for Alex is not that the problems be interesting, but that they express some concern that the intellectual community has yet to resolve. Certainly, he acknowledges that teaching technique is important, but it is more important to devise problems that grow out of conflicts in the way students understand the world, than problems which faculty generate out of their own concerns or out of things which they believe might psychologically interest students. For Nora, on the other hand, real (meaningful) means psychologically interesting. Alex: "I want some criteria for counting as a genuine intellectual problem." Nora: "genuine curiosity..." (5/11, A-2, 120). Alex's approach, according to Nora, is not "going to create an environment that makes students curious and interested" (6/1, A-1, 663).

Despite these differences, all sides are mandated to agree. Thus, they have to find some basis for agreement. Nora suggests "We need to synthesize the interpretive and problem solving approaches where possible by capitalizing that the emphasis is on a text based approach" (5/13, A-1, 200). Her solution is to find a common denominator, the use of primary sources, so that the two approaches are held together by the fact that they both oppose information transfer by means of pre-digested secondary sources and

support student intellectual growth (even if they don't agree in their definitions of intellectual growth).

Taking a different tack, Alex claims "The reason these two models are compatible is because if the hermeneutical (Alex's) model had a theory of learning, it might very well be incompatible with Nora's theory of learning; but it doesn't have a theory of learning, and, therefore, it is perfectly compatible with Nora's" (5/14, A-1, 415). Rather than finding a common denominator, Alex's approach is to say that the two program's don't conflict because they have entirely different aims. Thus, a program could address both concerns. Or, more realistically, they could agree not to disagree and have two programs existing side by side.

In an effort to arrive at a joint document, Alex writes what eventually becomes, with slight modifications, the final program. However, as would be expected, it is written in his language. ("Culture" appears in the final document, but "meaningful" does not.) Alex has the categories of higher and lower intellectual activities and he places Nora's position on his Procrustian bed. Since he does not have categories which would allow him to make sense of "meaningful" activities, these simply disappear from his draft. Thus, he defines the relationship between his program and Nora's as a relationship between higher and lower intellectual activities. Alex: "In terms of this language, which would seem to unify them, self-consciously

working within paradigms and working between paradigms" (5/29, B-1, 370). Alex uses Kuhn, to argue that the inquiry approach works with well defined logical rules to solve problems within well established ways of thinking, while the interpretive approach relies on a higher form of thinking which attempts to resolve differences between ways of conceiving of problems.

While Nora is interested in promoting intellectual activity among students, the affective component which is central her program is simply dropped from this document. Her reaction is predictable. "The students are asked to reflect on the different languages of different academic discourses and I find that an extremely flattened way to organize a curriculum for community colleges" (6/1, A-1, 210). Earlier, she had used the same language to criticize Alex's program "What we are doing in this program is flattening knowing to interpretation. There is more than analytic interpretation to knowing. There is an esthetic sensibility that is part of the human being who is educated....I will work into the language of what we are doing this notion of esthetic knowing, of the synthesis of emotional and cognitive understanding" (5/13, B-2, 69).

From Nora's perspective, then, her program includes the cognitive aspects Alex desires, but goes further in addressing the affective aspects left of out his program and not currently addressed by the curriculum. From Alex's

perspective, the final document includes the low level intellectual activities which Nora wants to pursue, but includes the high level thinking activities left out of Nora's program and not currently addressed by the curriculum. Each claims to be more complete than the other, each claims to include the other, and each claims that the other misrepresents their program. And each is correct from their perspective.

It might be argued, as the two participants attempted, that the two programs are complementary. However, no one was able to devise a common language which could express that complementarity. The relationship between the two program could only be expressed from the perspective of one or the other program. The extent of the incompatibility becomes more evident when we examine the nature of the faculty development programs that issue from each of the perspectives. Alex wants to focus faculty development on assignment making because he sees the assignments as carrying the intellectual agenda (i.e., the central aspect of the program). When he does this, he has a means of categorizing and critiquing assignments based on whether they involve higher or lower level thinking. For him, faculty development consists in developing and critiquing assignments and ways of reading student essays and primary texts in each of the disciplines.

Nora, though, is interested in going beyond the assignment. "What about group generation of activities, instead of assignments?" (6/1, A-2, 15) Since the intellectual level of the assignment is not at issue for Nora, she has only a marginal interest in the "wording" of the assignment. She wants to move beyond information transfer, but making no distinction between higher and lower intellectual activities, she lacks categories which would allow her to critique or evaluate writing assignments. She values diversity and a pragmatic electicism which would encourage faculty to share ideas, rather than think critically about them. In any case, even if she wanted to evaluate assignments, she lacks any criteria for differentiating among them. The emphasis, therefore, is on how to present assignments to students in a way that they will find them interesting. This results in faculty workshops based on sharing ways of making problems interesting and a faculty development process in which faculty share assignments and teaching methods, and jointly read texts to achieve an agreed upon interpretation.

Alex's program attempts to limit the intellectual activities which are acceptable. As one of the participants in the General Studies Institute notes about the relationship between Nora and Alex's programs: "It sounds like Alex is saying that he might find a narrower band of pedagogical practices acceptable." Nora responds: "Yes. I

think that is fairly safe. That's true" (5/11, B-2, 160). From Alex's perspective, to allow for a wide variety of intellectual practices (as is called for in Nora's program) means that the intellectual level of the culture in the college will reamin unchanged because faculty will be free to choose among high and low level intellectual practices as they please. In other words, it allows faculty to continue their present intellectual practices under the rubric of the program. Ironically, while the final program is written in Alex's language, the program actually favors the type of faculty development sought by Nora because while it differentiates between levels of intellectual activities, it has no mechanism for moving faculty from low to high level activities.

Good will and political pressure might have brought these two positions together in a common document. But, it appears that there are limits to what good will and political necessity can accomplish. They can combine incommensurable programs in a politically acceptable document, but not in one that is intellectually coherent. It is, therefore, not suprising that the two groups are not working together. The suprising thing is that they ever reached an agreement in the first place.

But, let us let Nora and Alex have the last word, as they sit down together to write a joint document.

Alex: Emphasis will be on ways of engaging participants in dialogue.

Nora: That's very good. (Mutters sentence to herself as she is writing it.)

Alex: In intellectual activities, in intellectual dialogue.

Nora: In meaningful dialogue! (5/13, A-2, 598)

Appendix

The following is an assignment used in the Honors Program in which Alex taught:

The Greeks are generally seen as possessing a highly developed and self-conscious "tragic view of life." This is expressed, of course, in those dramatic productions called "tragedies"; but commentators have also pointed to the epic and the histories as embodying the notion of the tragic. But whether there is some core notion of tragedy and what it might come to have been the source of continuing and sometimes fruitful scholarly debate for centuries. The central text in this conversation has been Aristotle's Poetics.

In a famous and influential recent book, Aristotle and Greek Tragedy, Professor John Jones attempts a massive reinterpretation of the traditional account of the Poetics. Pointing to the tension persons have often noticed between the traditional gloss and the great tragedies, Jones remarks:

> It is widely felt, and sometimes stated, that Aristotle's theory of tragedy cannot be fitted at all comfortably to the surviving fifth century plays; and this discrepancy is usually explained in one of two ways, by stressing the time gap between the end of the classical drama and the writing of the Poetics, or by alleging that Aristotle was personally ill-qualified to be a literary critic and theorist.

Aristotle was much nearer to the dramatic spirit of the fifth century than we are, and so, while we may agree with Jones, that "the question of personal qualifications is harder to solve", still for us Aristotle remains an authority. Or perhaps not. Aladair MacIntyre, in After Virtue, raises the possibility that while Aristotle understood the tragic as conceived by his predecessors, that he was specifically trying to reconceive it. On this line, the religious and cultural functions of the notion of the tragic become problematic as Aristotle does what he always does---have his predecessors speak in Aristotelian categories. Hence, the movement in the Poetics towards a much greater emphasis on the protagonist, who no longer is thought to be facing a universe fundamentally unfriendly to him. In Martha Nussbaum's recent The Fragility of Goodness, she develops a particularly sophisticated Aristotelian

reading of the tragedies in which the internal, moral qualities of the protagonist move to center stage.

So, under the influence of Aristotle, the moral qualities of the actors, and, in particular, their progressive and maturing moral understandings have been what seems to be interesting about the tragic. But, one wonders whether such readings, which depend so heavily on "flaws" of character and on "recognition" are at all useful in appreciating the strongly felt tragic quality of Homer and Thucydides (or even Sophocles). Perhaps Hayden White's insistence that a tragic narrative emphasizes structural and mechanistic aspect of a world which cannot be molded to human intentions is helpful in guiding interpretation.

These are assignments which were designed by Nora for inclusion in the general studies document based on exercises she did in her classes.

A more extended example of this type of reflective inquiry arises when considering the debate that surrounded the original production of Death of a Salesman. Critics raised the issue of whether there could be a tragic hero in the 20th Century, when we no longer share a world view which can make sense of tragedy. Wouldn't Willy Loman appear to be an incompetent fool, rather than a tragic hero to 20th Century audiences? Students could be led into this debate by an analysis of the play which required them to look at Loman's choices from both their own and Loman's perspectives. How does Loman conceive of his problem? How do you conceive of it? What options did Loman have other than suicide to solve his problem as he conceived of it? As you conceived of it? Does suicide solve the problem? Why didn't Loman chose an alternative? Could he have chosen another option given who he was? Given all this, is his life tragic? What do you mean by tragic? Is is possible to have a "classic" tragic hero in the 20th Century? (Proposal, p. 4-5)

In Candide, what should Candide do to be able to survive? What would you do? What political, religious and economic considerations would you have to take into account? If Candide had to write home for help whom would he write to? What would he say? (The Inquiry Approach, General Studies internal document)

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges FEB 17 1989